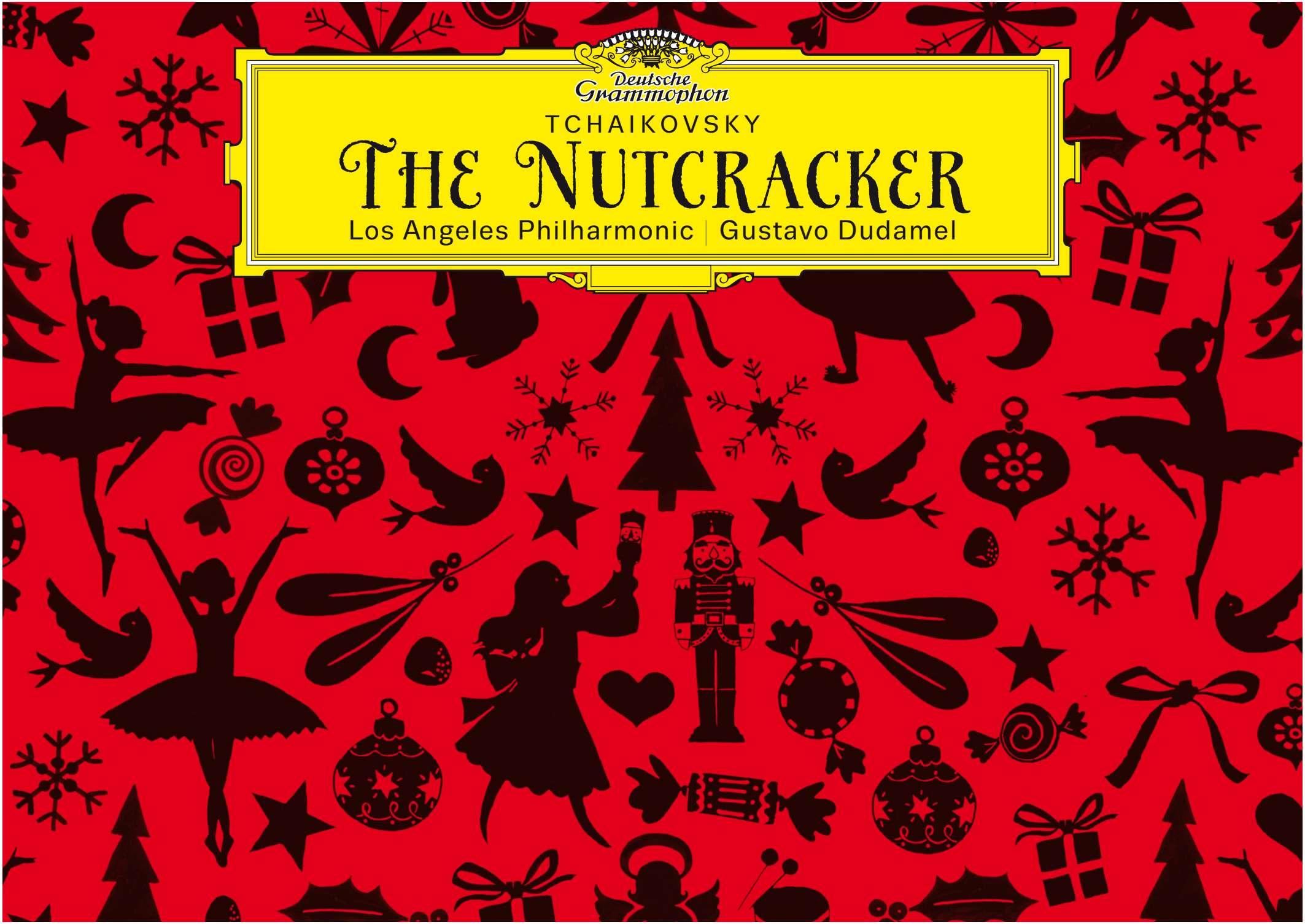
Deutsche Grammophon
TCHAIKOVSKY
THE NUTCRACKER
Los Angeles Philharmonic | Gustavo Dudamel

PYOTR ILYICH TCHAIKOVSKY 1840–1893

The Nutcracker op. 71

Fairy Ballet in 2 Acts and 3 Scenes
Libretto: Marius Petipa after E. T. A. Hoffmann's story *The Nutcracker and the Mouse King*

1 Overture 3:14
Allegro giusto

ACT I
Scene 1

2 No. 1: Scene. Decoration and Illumination of the Christmas Tree 3:52
Allegro non troppo – Più moderato – Allegro vivace

3 No. 2: March 2:25
Tempo di marcia viva

4 No. 3: Children's Galop and Entry of the Parents 2:26
Presto – Andante – Allegro

5 No. 4: Dance Scene. Arrival of Drosselmayer 5:48
Andantino – Allegro vivo – Andantino sostenuto – Più andante – Allegro molto vivace – Tempo di valse – Presto

6 No. 5: Scene. Presentation of the Nutcracker and Grandfather's Dance 6:52
Andante – Andantino – Moderato assai – Andante – L'istesso tempo – Tempo di Gross-Vater – Allegro vivacissimo

7 No. 6: Scene. Clara and the Nutcracker 7:02
Allegro semplice – Moderato con moto – Allegro giusto – Più allegro – Moderato assai

8 No. 7: Scene. The Nutcracker Battles the Army of the Mouse King – He Wins and Is Transformed into Prince Charming 3:15
Allegro vivo

Scene 2

9 No. 8: Scene. A Pine Forest in Winter 3:56
Andante

10 No. 9: Waltz of the Snowflakes 6:46
Tempo di valse, ma con moto – Presto

ACT II
Scene 3

11 No. 10: Scene. The Magic Castle on the Mountain of Sweets 4:18
Andante

12 No. 11: Scene. Clara and Prince Charming 4:47
Andante con moto – Moderato – Allegro agitato – Poco più allegro – Tempo precedente

No. 12: Divertissement

13 a. Chocolate (Spanish Dance) *Allegro brillante* 1:11

14 b. Coffee (Arabian Dance) *Comodo* 4:00

15 c. Tea (Chinese Dance) *Allegro moderato* 1:04

16 d. Trépak (Russian Dance) *Tempo di trepak, molto vivace* 1:09

17 e. Dance of the Reed Pipes *Andantino* 2:21

18 f. Mother Gigogne and the Clowns *Allegro giocoso – Andante – Allegro vivo* 2:42

19	No. 13: Waltz of the Flowers *Tempo di valse*	7:30
	No. 14: Pas de deux. The Prince and the Sugar-Plum Fairy	
20	a. Intrada *Andante maestoso*	5:13
21	b. Variation 1 *Tempo di Tarantella*	0:46
22	c. Variation 2. Dance of the Sugar-Plum Fairy *Andante ma non troppo – Presto*	2:21
23	d. Coda *Vivace assai*	1:23
24	No. 15: Final Waltz and Apotheosis *Molto meno*	5:17

Los Angeles Philharmonic
GUSTAVO DUDAMEL

Los Angeles Children's Chorus 10
Anne Tomlinson *artistic director*

AN INSTINCT FOR DANCE MUSIC –

TCHAIKOVSKY'S "NUTCRACKER"

by Orrin Howard

When reading about Tchaikovsky and *The Nutcracker* in a book written around 1950, one finds the comment that the ballet was somewhat successful at first, but that, since that time (1892), there have been very few performances outside Russia. How times have changed! For several decades since that observation was made, in America *The Nutcracker* has been – and continues to be – *the* attraction that proclaims the Christmas holiday season from sea to shining sea. In productions large, small, and in-between, with choreography by a variety of dance creators, this dance theater piece captivates children and the child that lives still in any adult. Because, for the children and the big people who take them to a performance of the ballet, the great equalizer is the marvelous score by Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky.

The Nutcracker, the third and last of the ballet scores by Tchaikovsky, was preceded by the equally grand scores for *Swan Lake* and *The Sleeping Beauty*. These danced stage works form a triumvirate of what can easily be called the greatest ballets of the 19th century. Interestingly, Tchaikovsky had his own view. In a letter to his patroness Nadezhda von Meck, he wrote, "I have just heard some new music, the ballet *Sylvia* by the French composer Delibes. I knew it before from the piano arrangement, but, in the wonderful performance of the Vienna orchestra, it completely charmed, particularly the first part. My own *Lake of Swans* is simply trash in comparison with *Sylvia*." (How self-effacing, and wrong, can a great composer be? Although *Sylvia is* delightful.)

It detracts not at all from the brilliance of Tchaikovsky's three ballets to observe that the composer had written music that is perfectly suitable for dance in all manner of non-ballet compositions, in symphonies, chamber music, etc. On one occasion, when criticized by Sergei Taneyev for "dance music" in the Fourth Symphony, Tchaikovsky defended himself by saying that there is good dance music and not-so-good dance music, the implication being that his was the good kind. The point was that it was perfectly normal for Tchaikovsky to compose music for the ballet because he had been writing dance music forever.

Nor was it possible for him to remain indifferent to an art form that had become dominant in his country's cultural world. Russia had found its dancing feet *vis-à-vis* the Frenchman Marius Petipa. Petipa had gone to St. Petersburg in 1847, there to develop a Russian school that flourished brilliantly under his direction. What was even more important than dance itself to a composer like Tchaikovsky was Petipa's creation of grand productions in which music was deemed not merely a necessary accessory, but a vital and integral part of the whole.

Enter Tchaikovsky, whose instinct for dance music, as we have seen, surfaced in scores long before he became involved with the ballet theater. His first ballet, *Swan Lake*, had been staged first in 1877 but had not been acclaimed until given wholly new choreography by Petipa and Lev Ivanov and presented again in 1895. By that time the composer was dead, but he had lived to see the success of two other Petipa collaborations: *The Sleeping Beauty* in 1890 and *The Nutcracker* in 1892. The latter is based on a story by E.T.A. Hoffmann, *The Nutcracker and the Mouse-King*, a tale for which, in truth, Tchaikovsky had no particular fondness. He obviously overcame these reservations, however, as well as his resentment at Petipa's measure-by-measure instructions, for he went on to produce truly wondrous music. Indeed, like Tchaikovsky, Russian audiences were not entirely sympathetic to the ballet's German story, but they were won over by the music, which was heard in a concert suite even before the ballet's first staging had taken place on December 17, 1892, on a double bill with *Iolanta*, his last opera.

After a delicious miniature overture, **Act I** begins at a Christmas party at which the host's daughter, Clara, is given a nutcracker in the shape of an old man with a giant jaw. Becoming immediately devoted to the nut-cracking gentleman, Clara is distraught when the fellow is broken; unable to sleep during the night, she comes in to look at her injured friend and finds that he and all the toys have come to life. Soon an army of mice appears upon the scene and the nutcracker leads the toys against the rodent enemy to very impressive fairy tale war music. Taking courage, Clara kills the mouse-king with a shoe, and with this victory, the nutcracker is

transformed into a handsome young Prince who takes the girl with him to a moonlit forest in which snowflakes dance around them, to the waltzing wordless sighs of children's voices.

The Prince's kingdom is the land of sweets, *Confiturembourg*, and it is here that **Act II** takes place. Ruling over this land is the Sugar-Plum Fairy, who, along with the Prince's sisters, welcomes Clara enthusiastically. The music that prepares for their entry into the land is expansive and gracious: strings and winds, with harps in ever-present attendance, sing a simple but panoramic theme. The melody, oft-repeated in varying orchestrations, takes a dazzling turn when, again presented by strings, it is vitalized by piccolo, flutes, and clarinets skyrocketing upward on breathtaking, whiplash scales.

The celebration of dances that follows contains some of the most familiar music of *The Nutcracker*, known through the beloved concert suite. The divertissements begin with the Spanish Dance (chocolate), a lively bolero initiated by trumpet and sparked by the rhythmic snap of castanets. Next is the Arabian Dance (coffee), and Tchaikovsky goes exotic: woodwinds and violins present a languorous melody that sways first to a rocking accompaniment in low strings, then to a persistent drone bass. The composer's *chinoiserie* for the Chinese Dance (tea) involves flutes and piccolo on a quaint, ornate melody in the high register, and a persistent, single-harmony accompanying figure in bassoons. In the Trépak (Russian Dance), Tchaikovsky is on home ground with wildly energetic music in which the mind's eye as well as the seeing eye can be amazed by the whirling, leaping, kicking Russian figures cavorting with furious abandon. The Dance of the Mirlitons, also known as the Dance of the Reed Pipes (a mirliton is a homemade instrument known to French children), begins with a delicate, elegant melody presented by three flutes and goes on to one of those wonderfully balletic, smile-inducing hippety-hop ideas – this one with pseudo-seriousness enforced by a minor key. The Old Woman Who Lived in a Shoe is followed by what many consider the signature piece of *The Nutcracker*: the *Waltz of the Flowers*. Here, Tchaikovsky is at his most engaging, gracious, and brilliant, for the waltz proper is preceded by a grandiose introduction in winds and harp, the latter highlighted by dazzling cadenza flourishes.

Another of the score's best-known and -loved episodes occurs in the second variation of the *grand pas de deux* – the Dance of the Sugar-Plum Fairy. The celesta etches the Fairy's melody, oh-so-delicately and, with Tchaikovskian tongue firmly in cheek, a comment is given in the deep tones of the bass clarinet. In the composer's use of the celesta hangs a tale with a touch of intrigue. In 1891, Tchaikovsky wrote to his publisher Jurgenson: "I have discovered a new instrument in Paris, something between a piano and a glockenspiel, with a divinely beautiful tone. I want to introduce this into *The Nutcracker* and the symphonic poem *The Voyevode*. The instrument is called the *Celesta Mustel* and costs 1,200 francs. You can only buy it from the inventor, Mustel, in Paris. I want to ask you to order one of these instruments. You will not lose by it, because you can hire it out to the concerts at which *The Voyevode* will be played, and afterwards sell it to the Opera when my ballet is put on. Have it sent to Petersburg [and now for the intrigue], but no one there must know about it. I am afraid Rimsky-Korsakov and Glazunov might hear of it and make use of the new effect before I could. I expect the instrument will make a tremendous sensation." One would think it difficult for a tinkly little instrument, even a lovely-sounding one, to make a sensation, much less a tremendous one. But it did – and still does – and gives a special radiance to the Sugar-Plum music. Tchaikovsky's instrumental idea was right on the money – Jurgenson's money.

The ballet's final waltz is, expectedly, a grand affair. The Apotheosis brings back the magical music of the opening of Act II; this time the celesta joins the harps, making the mood even more ephemeral than before. Then there is that amazing, and gloriously orchestrated, theme built on a simple descending major scale. (Who else could make such music on a major scale? Tchaikovsky did it often in his works.) Finally, brass and winds join in full force, and the curtain falls to the effulgent and exciting sounds of incomparable romantic ballet grandeur.

The late Orrin Howard served the Los Angeles Philharmonic as Director of Publications and Archives for more than 20 years.

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